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Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields

Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit

Letter dated 25 September 2016 from the Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith a note from the Holy See regarding the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which is published in the Vatican today, 25 September 2016, on the first anniversary of the adoption of the 2030 Agenda (see annex).

I should be very grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the seventy-first session of the General Assembly, under agenda items 13 and 117.

(*Signed*) Archbishop Bernardito **Auza**
Permanent Observer of the Holy See

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Annex to the letter dated 25 September 2016 from the Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

"Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", outcome document of the United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda, held from 25 to 27 September 2015, in New York

Note from the Holy See

Introduction

1. With proper and laudable aspirations, the 2030 Agenda, a non-binding international plan of action, was adopted by the General Assembly in the form of a resolution.[1] It is divided into five parts: (a) the preamble; (b) the Declaration; (c) the Sustainable Development Goals and targets; (d) the means of implementation and the Global Partnership; (e) the follow-up and review.

2. In fulfilling its specifically spiritual and moral mission in the international community and within the framework of its particular status in the United Nations, the Holy See actively participated in the negotiations over the course of nearly two and a half years, both in the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals and in the intergovernmental negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda.

3. Pope Francis, in his address to the General Assembly on 25 September 2015, described the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the summit as "an important sign of hope". A hope that will be realized if the Agenda is truly, fairly and effectively implemented.

4. However, Pope Francis has warned the international community about the danger of falling into "a declarationist nominalism", which means the practice of "assuaging consciences" with solemn and agreeable declarations, rather than rendering "truly effective the struggle against all scourges". The Holy See, for example, expresses its hope that the current indicator of extreme poverty, approximately a dollar a day, could be accompanied by or substituted with more ambitious and broader indicators. The Holy Father has also alerted the international community to the peril of thinking that "a single theoretical and aprioristic solution will provide an answer to all the challenges".

5. Heeding the words of Pope Francis, the Holy See wishes to consider certain principles in evaluating the 2030 Agenda and in interpreting and implementing it at the national and international levels. To this end, the present note is divided into two parts. Part I sets out the key points contained in the address of Pope Francis to the United Nations as they relate to the 2030 Agenda. Part II considers the 2030 Agenda in the light of these and other principles.

Part I: general principles

6. **Understanding integral human development**. The pillars of integral human development, namely, the right to life and, more generally, the right to existence of human nature itself, are threatened when we no longer recognize

[1] General Assembly resolution 70/1 of 25 September 2015, entitled "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development".

any instance above ourselves or see nothing else but ourselves. This can only be remedied by recognition of a moral law that is written into human nature itself, one which includes absolute respect for life in all its stages and dimensions and the natural difference between man and woman. Human rights derive from a correct understanding of human nature, the human person, inherent human dignity and the moral law.

7. **Recognizing the poor as dignified agents of their own destiny**. To enable men and women to escape from extreme poverty, they must be dignified agents of their own destiny, taking into consideration that integral human development and the full exercise of human dignity cannot be imposed, but rather allowed to unfold for each individual, for every family, in relation to others, and in a right relationship with those areas in which human social life develops.[2]

8. **Providing both spiritual and material means**. At the same time, the minimum spiritual and material means are needed to enable a person to live in dignity and to create and support a family, which is the primary cell of any social development. In practical terms, this means: religious freedom and education, as well as lodging, labour, land, food, water and health care.

9. **Respect for the principle of justice**. Justice[3] requires concrete steps and immediate measures for preserving and improving the natural environment and putting an end to the phenomenon of social and economic exclusion, with its baneful consequences.[4]

10. **The right to education in the light of the transcendent destiny of the human person**. The right to a quality and integral education must include religious education. This presupposes a holistic approach, which is ensured first and foremost by respecting and reinforcing the primary right of the family to educate its children, as well as the right of churches and social groups to support and assist families in this endeavour. Indeed, education, which etymologically means "to bring out" or "to lead out", has a fundamental role in helping people to discover their talents and potential for putting them at the service of mankind: each person has something to offer to society and must be enabled to provide his or her contribution. An authentic education should focus on relationships because development is the fruit of good relations.

11. **Respect for the rule of law**. It follows that if we want true integral human development for all, we must work to avoid conflict between nations and between peoples by ensuring the uncontested rule of law.

12. **Peaceful resolution of disputes**. We must have recourse to the peaceful resolution of disputes through dialogue, negotiation, mediation and arbitration; the renewal and acceleration of efforts in the disarmament process; transparency in the sale of arms and prohibitions in this trade to countries in conflict.

13. **Service to others and respect for the common good**. This calls for a wisdom which is open to the reality of transcendence and which recognizes that

[2] For example, families, friends, communities, towns and cities, schools, businesses and unions, provinces and nations.

[3] It is noteworthy that the perennial concept of justice is the constant and perpetual will to give to the other what is his or her due.

[4] For example, human trafficking, the marketing of human organs and tissues, the sexual exploitation of boys and girls, slave labour, including prostitution, the drug and weapons trade, terrorism and international organized crime.

the full meaning of individual and collective life is found in selfless service to others and in the prudent and respectful use of creation for the common good.

14. **Building the foundation of universal fraternity**. In the final analysis, the common home of all men and women must continue to be constructed on the foundations of a correct understanding of universal fraternity and respect for the sacredness of created nature, beginning with every human life.

Part II: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

15. The 2030 Agenda is a clear sign that, in spite of differences in some areas, the international community has come together and affirmed its commitment to eradicate poverty in all its forms and dimensions and to ensure that all children, women and men throughout the world will have the conditions necessary to live in true freedom and dignity. Keeping in mind that the Holy See agrees with most of the goals and targets enumerated in the Agenda, at this point, the Holy See, in conformity with its nature and particular mission, wishes to make clarifications and reservations on some of the concepts used in the 2030 Agenda. The Holy See wishes to highlight the fact that the comments made herein take into consideration the reservations it entered into the record concerning targets 3.7 and 5.6, paragraph 26 of the Agenda as well as certain expressions, the full details of which can be found in the Holy See's position statement on the 2030 Agenda.[5]

16. **Interpretation**. The 2030 Agenda acknowledges that it must be interpreted in accordance with international law, including international human rights law (General Assembly resolution 70/1, paras. 10, 18 and 19).

(a) That the Agenda should be interpreted pursuant to these norms means — and the Holy See emphasizes — a "proper interpretation" in accordance with consolidated and recognized principles.[6]

(b) In this regard, the Holy See maintains that the 2030 Agenda should be construed in good faith according to the ordinary meaning of the terms in their context and in the light of the 2030 Agenda's object and purpose, which is set out in the preamble and reaffirmed in the Declaration.

(c) It follows that the goals, targets and eventual indicators should not be considered in isolation from the Agenda.

(d) The Holy See is guided by the concept of the common good, as defined in the present note (see para. 19 (b)), in addition to the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity, which are explicitly reflected in the 2030 Agenda, in a variety of ways.

(e) The principles of national sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of States are also explicitly acknowledged along with the "different approaches, visions, models and tools available to each country" (ibid., para. 59; see also preamble, para. 5 and paras. 3, 5, 18, 21, 38, 47, 55, 56).

[5] Position statement of the Holy See on the outcome document of the United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda, "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" (New York, 1 September 2015); see also the explanation of position and reservations of the Holy See on the report of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (A/68/970/Add.1, pp. 22-23).

[6] Ibid.

17. **Purpose of the Agenda**. With the 2030 Agenda, the international community is committed to "eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions" (preamble, para. 1) based on the "centrality of the human person as the subject primarily responsible for development" and the related pledge that "no one will be left behind" (preamble, para. 2 and paras. 4, 48).[7]

(a) It is in this perspective that the entire 2030 Agenda should be read, and this includes the respect for the right to life of the person, from conception until natural death.[8]

(b) The poles of human life have been described by Pope Francis as "the strength" and "memory" of the family in underlining that "[a] people incapable of caring for children and caring for the elderly is a people without a future, because it lacks the strength and the memory needed to move forward".[9]

18. **Centrality of the human person**. That the human person is the primary subject responsible for development (preamble, paras. 1, 2, 5 and 7 and paras. 1, 2, 27, 50, 52, 74 (e)), means that we need a deeper appreciation "of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone".[10]

(a) This, in turn, entails a growing awareness of our general human nature, of the transcendent dimension of human existence as well as respect for the human body in its femininity or masculinity.[11]

(b) A correct understanding of the human person, as a unity of body and soul, leads to a recognition that sexuality is an important dimension of human identity.

(c) Sexuality must be lived in accordance with the dignity of each person, who does not have individual sexual rights, since a sexual relationship requires full respect for the dignity and liberty of each person forming the couple.

19. **The concept of human dignity**. The 2030 Agenda uses the term "dignity" in a variety of ways (preamble, para. 4 and paras. 4, 8, 50).

(a) It acknowledges the dignity of every human being in using the term "human dignity", which the Holy See understands to mean inherent and inalienable human dignity, that is, the transcendent worth of the human person, from which rights and duties derive.[12]

(b) The Agenda also speaks of persons who live in dignity, which the Holy See relates to the principle of the common good: an objective evaluation of a relatively thorough and ready access to the sum of conditions of social life directed to integral development and genuine fulfilment.[13]

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Pope Francis, "Prayer vigil for the Festival of Families: address of the Holy Father", Philadelphia, 26 September 2015.

[10] Position statement on the 2030 Agenda.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Universal Declaration of Human Rights, preamble, para. 1; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, preamble, paras. 1 and 2; and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, preamble, paras. 1 and 2.

[13] See Catechism of the Catholic Church 1905-1912, 1924-1927 (1993); and Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern world, *Gaudium et Spes*, 7 December 1965, No. 26.

(c) In addition, the Holy See maintains that each person has an "acquired dignity" that is developed when one freely maximizes or perfects his or her possibilities in accordance with right reason, and for believers, such reason is illumined by faith.[14]

20. **Promotion of women and men, girls and boys**. We must acknowledge that women have a special role to play in the family and society and with specific regard to integral human development per se.

(a) This is due to their unique presence in the creation of life as physical and spiritual mothers, who have special, but not exclusive gifts, that include defending, nurturing, and caring for life, from conception until natural death.

(b) It follows that women must be promoted and given the means to realize their inherent dignity as feminine persons and protected from psychological and physical violence, through all forms of abortion, including female feticide and female infanticide, so that they can contribute their gifts in all contexts of society, including informal peace processes (such as the family and various organizations) and formal peace processes.

(c) The Holy See emphasizes that any references to "gender", "gender equality" and "gender equality and empowerment of women and girls" are understood according to the ordinary, generally accepted usage of the word "gender" based on the biological identity that is male and female, which is, in turn, reinforced by the numerous references in the 2030 Agenda to both sexes (paras. 15, 20, 25). Pope Francis, following in the footsteps of his predecessors, has frequently spoken about the perils of "gender ideology" which denies the relevance of biological sex, male and female, in opining that there is a plethora of "genders" based on one's subjective perceptions.[15]

(d) By using the term "promotion", instead of "empowerment", the Holy See seeks to avoid a disordered view of authority as power rather than service,[16] and expresses the hope that women and girls, in particular, will challenge this flawed perspective of authority with a view to humanizing the situations in which they live.

(e) Consequently, to avoid ideological and political connotations, the expression "promotion of women" should be understood as respect for the dignity of women, strengthening them, educating them, giving them a voice when they have none and helping them to develop abilities and assume responsibilities.

(f) However, the promotion of women is difficult to achieve without the "promotion of men", in the sense of encouraging and supporting them to be responsible husbands and fathers and to assume their responsibilities in advancing the integral development of women and girls.

21. **Health**. The Holy See supports and promotes access to basic health care and affordable medicines as well as a broad health-care context which includes

[14] Pontifical Council for the Family, "The family and human rights", 1998, No. 13.

[15] See, for example, Pope Francis, "Address to the bishops of the Episcopal Conference of Puerto Rico on their *Ad Limina* visit", *Domus Sanctae Marthae*, 8 June 2015; see also encyclical letter "*Laudato Si*: On Care for Our Common Home", 24 May 2015, No. 155; and "Address to the United Nations Organization", New York, 25 September 2015.

[16] Pope Francis, homily, 19 March 2013; see also Congregation on the Doctrine of the Faith, "Letter to the bishops of the Catholic Church on the collaboration of men and women in the Church and in the world" (2004).

clean water, sanitation, electricity for hospitals and health-care units and the training of nurses and doctors. The Holy See reads Goal 2 as including the right to food and Goal 6 as including the right to water and the concept of affordable water.

(a) The term "healthy life" is to be understood to mean the health of the person as a whole — including the most vulnerable, the unborn, the sick, the disabled — during all stages of development of the life of the person, taking into consideration every dimension (physical, psychological, spiritual and emotional).

(b) Since the right to health is a corollary to the right to life, it can never be used as a way to end the life of a person, who is such from conception until natural death. The same is true for targets 3.7 and 5.6. In brief, target 3.7 advocates "universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes" while target 5.6 calls for "universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights".

(c) In regard to "reproductive health" and related expressions, including "sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights" (target 5.6), the very terms "reproduction" and "reproductive" are problematic since they obscure the transcendent dimension of human procreation. The term "procreation" is preferred because it reflects the participation of the couple, man and woman, in God's work of creation.

(d) The Holy See does not consider such terms as applying to a holistic concept of health, as they fail to embrace, each in their own particular way, the person in the entirety of his or her personality, mind and body, and they further fail to foster the achievement of personal maturity in sexuality and in the area of mutual love and decision-making, thereby overlooking the characteristics of the conjugal relationship between a married man and woman that are in accordance with moral norms.[17] The Holy See rejects the interpretation that considers abortion or access to abortion, maternal surrogacy or sex-selective abortion, and sterilization as dimensions of these terms.

(e) In regard to Goal 10 devoted to reducing inequality within and among countries and target 10.b on development assistance, it should be understood that States and international organizations are not permitted to use coercion or the exertion of pressure on other States and organizations in order to impose policies that undermine the ethical and cultural foundations of the society through international economic assistance or development programmes.[18]

(f) Similarly, national governments should ensure that public and private health care respect the inherent dignity of the human person and ethical and medical protocols, based on right reason, as well as the freedom of religion and right to conscientious objection of health-care workers and providers.

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[17] See *Report of the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5-13 September 1994* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.95.XIII.18), chap. V, para. 27; see also position statement on the 2030 Agenda.

[18] In "*Laudato Si*: On Care for Our Common Home", No. 50, the Pope lamented that "[i]nstead of resolving the problems of the poor and thinking of how the world can be different, some can only propose a reduction in the birth rate" and apply international pressure on developing countries, "which make economic assistance contingent on certain policies of 'reproductive health'".

22. **The rights and duties of the family**. That the human person, a social being, is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda means — and the Holy See emphasizes — that the family, the natural and fundamental unit of society, based on marriage between one man and one woman, is also at the centre of development, and in accordance with international human rights law is entitled to protection by society and the State.[19] The 2030 Agenda also rightly recognizes the importance of "cohesive communities and families" (para. 25).

(a) The communion between husband and wife gives life to the love and solidarity of all members of the family, from which local, national, regional and international solidarity derive. For purposes of international law, a distinction must be made between the family as a "unit of society" and "household", the term used in Goal 5, target 5.4.

(b) The latter term includes a variety of living situations (for example, child-headed households, single mothers with children under their care, cohabitating couples), whose individual members and their well-being are always of concern for the State. On the other hand, such protection should never detract from the special protection that must be given to the family which is the natural and fundamental unit of society as a subject of rights and duties prior to the State.[20]

(c) On this point, the Holy See relies on the "Charter of the Rights of the Family" (1983) in relation to what protection for the family might entail through its consideration of the issues based on right reason.

(d) In the words of Pope Francis, "[w]e cannot call any society healthy when it does not leave real room for family life. We cannot think that a society has a future when it fails to pass laws capable of protecting families and ensuring their basic needs".[21]

23. **The rights and duties of parents**. The recognition of the special protection to be given the family based on the marriage between one man and one woman, recognized in international law, means that the international community favours the transmission of life with the intimate relationship of parents and care of their children.

(a) This reality is supported by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, when it recognizes that the family is "the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children" (Convention on the Rights of the Child, preamble, para. 5); and when it acknowledges that a

[19] Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art. 16.3; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, art. 23.1; and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, art. 10.1.

[20] Ibid.

[21] See "Prayer vigil for the Festival of Families: address of the Holy Father", 2015; see also the intervention of the Secretary for Relations with States at the United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda, New York, 27 September 2015: "The family, the natural and fundamental unit of society, is the primary agent of sustainable development, and therefore the model of communion and solidarity among nations and international institutions. A shared concern for the family and its members is a sure contributor to poverty reduction, better outcomes for children, equality between girls and boys, women and men, as well as improved work-family-rest balance, and stronger intra- and intergenerational bonds. It would do us well not to forget the ample evidence that family-friendly policies — including respect for religion and the right of parents to educate their children — contribute effectively to the achievement of development goals, including the cultivation of peaceful societies".

child has the "right to know and be cared for by his or her parents" (Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 7).

(b) The Holy See underlines that it cannot endorse methods of family planning which fundamentally separate the essential dimensions of sexuality, namely the unitive and procreative elements of the conjugal act between a husband and a wife.[22]

(c) Moreover, the responsible and moral decisions concerning the number of children and the spacing of births belong to parents, who must be free from all coercion and pressure from public authorities, including any demographic data that might induce fear and anxiety about the future. Fertility awareness and education are fundamental in the promotion of responsible parenthood.[23]

(d) The governments of countries should also be free from similar coercion and pressure, especially by "oppressive lending systems".[24] In this regard, Pope Francis has also underlined the perils of "ideological colonization", that is, when the cost of receiving the money is the imposition of an idea upon the people that "changes, or means to change, a mentality or a structure".[25]

(e) Furthermore, in the first instance, parents have the responsibility to protect the rights of the children "before as well as after birth" and together with the State must ensure access "to pre-natal and post-natal health care" (Convention on the Rights of the Child, preamble, para. 9 and para. 24).

(f) Consequently, the Holy See reads the 2030 Agenda, with particular regard to the reduction of preventable "newborn, child and maternal mortality", so as to include the unborn child.

(g) With specific regard to young parents, so that a man and a woman of the appropriate age may marry each other, conditions must be developed to assist these couples with particular attention to work, education, rest and family balancing issues.

(h) In addition, the Holy See has continually emphasized the prior rights of parents to educate their child according to their religious and moral beliefs, including dimensions of human love and related matters concerning the nature of sexuality, marriage and the family.[26]

24. **Freedom of religion**. From the perspective of the Holy See, the phrase ending "poverty in all its forms" (General Assembly resolution 70/1, preamble, para. 1), includes material, social and spiritual poverty. The 2030 Agenda acknowledges intercultural understanding and recognizes international human rights law, both of which include religious freedom.

(a) The Holy See wishes to emphasize that the religious dimension is not a "subculture without right to a voice in the public square"; it is a fundamental

[22] See position statement on the 2030 Agenda; see also *Report of the International Conference on Population and Development*, chap. V, para. 27.

[23] See Pope Francis, "Meeting with representatives of civil society: address of the Holy Father", Apostolic journey to Ecuador, Plurinational State of Bolivia and Paraguay, July 2015.

[24] See "Address to the United Nations Organization", New York, 25 September 2015.

[25] See Pope Francis, in-flight press conference from the Philippines to Rome, 19 January 2015; see also "Meeting with families: address of His Holiness Pope Francis", Mall of Asia Arena, Manila, 16 January 2015.

[26] Ibid.

part of every people and every nation and "by its nature, transcends places of worship and the private sphere of individuals and families".[27]

(b) Religious freedom "shapes the way we interact socially and personally with our neighbours whose religious views differ from our own" and interreligious dialogue, permits us to speak to one another, as opposed to taking up arms.[28]

(c) Taking into consideration the ongoing atrocities against Christians and other religious minorities, the Holy See maintains that issues relating to religious freedom per se and freedom of conscience as well as interreligious and intrareligious dialogue must be given priority for the ultimate success of the 2030 Agenda.

(d) Indeed, the separate goals in the 2030 Agenda relating to peace and inclusive societies are of particular importance for the related crisis concerning the increasing numbers of migrants, refugees and displaced persons, who are obviously bringing with them various religious traditions.

(e) The strength, determination and perseverance of these people "remind us of the transcendent dimension of human existence and our irreducible freedom in the face of any claim to absolute power".[29]

25. **Integral human development**. According to the 2030 Agenda, it is an "integrated" development plan based on the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental, which, as noted above, puts the human person at the heart of the plan (preamble).

(a) This means that the success of the 2030 Agenda depends upon going beyond the language of economics and statistics precisely because the real emphasis is on the human person and his or her activities.[30]

(b) Therefore, considerations of a moral, spiritual and religious dimension cannot be ignored without serious detriment to the human person and his or her full development.

(c) It follows that Goal 12 on ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns should be understood as not only regarding limits on natural resources but also as including criteria that relates to the promotion of solidarity and self-restraint.

(d) With regard to the term "sustainable development" the Holy See understands the concept as referring to the acknowledgement of "the limits of available resources, and of the need to respect the integrity and the cycles of nature … [as well as] the nature of each being and of its mutual connection in an ordered system, which is precisely the cosmos".[31]

(e) The Holy See prefers to use the expression "integral human development", which includes sustainable development.

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[27] See Pope Francis, "Meeting for religious liberty with the Hispanic community and other immigrants: address of the Holy Father", Philadelphia, 26 September 2015.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

[30] See position statement on the 2030 Agenda; see also the intervention of the Secretary for Relations with States, New York, 27 September 2015.

[31] Pope John Paul II, encyclical letter, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 30 December 1987, Nos. 26 and 34.